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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
23 February 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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OCI No. 0774/65

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
23 February 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUMThe Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 ESTPolitical Developments in South Vietnam

1. There has been little change in the situation during the past 24 hours. General Khanh remains in Dalat, but Saigon radio announced today that he has been appointed a "roving ambassador," thus apparently paving the way for his early departure from South Vietnam. There is some indication that Khanh may eventually be named either ambassador to the US, replacing General Khiem, or Vietnam's representative to the UN.

2. Khanh may attempt to use the time remaining before his departure in last-minute intrigues to recoup his position. Since the other generals appear solidly united in opposition to Khanh, however, it seems unlikely that any such attempt would succeed.

3. The Armed Forces Council meanwhile is beginning to make changes in various key positions in the military establishment. Among the first is the appointment of General Tran Van Don, a major target of General Khanh's coup a year ago, as chief of the Central Intelligence Organization. Another important change is the replacement of the chief of police, who has been a particular object of Buddhist wrath, by a follower of General Thi, the I Corps commander. Thi has emerged from the latest upheaval with considerably enhanced power.

Viet Cong Military Activity

4. MACV notes a sudden spurt of Viet Cong activity following the abortive coup attempt of 19

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February, but actions reported thus far have been limited to harassment, sabotage and small-scale guerrilla warfare. A National Liberation Front broadcast of 20 February took note of the latest leadership upheaval in Saigon, urging supporters of the Front to take advantage of it by intensifying their efforts both in the countryside and in the cities.

5. The senior US military advisor in II Corps reports that the security situation in Phu Yen Province has deteriorated markedly in recent weeks to the point where it now approximates that of adjacent Binh Dinh Province. It is possible that the arms cache discovered near the sunken Communist vessel off Phu Yen had been intended to support efforts by the Viet Cong to consolidate their gains and expand their holdings in Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen Provinces and to open up new areas of activity in Khanh Hoa and other areas farther south along the coast.

Communist Political Developments

6. The Soviet Union yesterday warned once again of the danger of expanding the conflict in Vietnam. The Soviet press repeated calls for negotiations to avoid such a development.

7. At the 22 February Soviet Army Day rally in Moscow, Defense Minister Malinovsky repeated earlier Soviet pledges of "necessary support" for North Vietnam and warned that US actions in Vietnam threaten "to kindle the flames of a big war." Soviet propaganda media, meanwhile, stressed that negotiations offer the best way out of the current situation. Referring to recent messages by Mikoyan and De Gaulle to Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, Moscow radio commented that "any sane man" realizes that "immediate peaceful negotiations" constitute the only alternative to expanded war in Vietnam.

8. Hanoi radio noted, without comment, a Cambodian Foreign Ministry note of 16 February which repeated Sihanouk's recent messages to France, India, the USSR and Burma. Sihanouk requested these countries to intervene "immediately" to convince US and British leaders to accept "without delay and without prerequisites" conditions leading to the convening

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of the Geneva Conference. There has, so far, been no hint of any give on the part of Hanoi toward genuine negotiations. The North Vietnamese probably hope that such calls for talks will encourage other nations to put pressure on the US to halt further military action against North Vietnam.

9. Peiping, claiming to quote the North Vietnamese radio report of the Cambodian note, ignored the call for a conference altogether, stressing instead that part of the Cambodian statement which demanded the US put an "immediate end to its aggressive war in Indochina."

10. The British Consul General in Hanoi believes that the North Vietnamese leaders were not so impressed by the air strikes as to attempt to restrain the Viet Cong. He thinks that they might not be able to restrain them even if they wanted to, since the Viet Cong now scent victory. The Consul holds the opinion that the North Vietnamese leaders are quite prepared to suffer further air strikes, even ones wiping out major industrial installations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The British official described the leaders in Hanoi as "viciously self-confident" and so thoroughly convinced by their success against the French that nothing can prevent them from gaining complete victory. He also regards them as "unbelievably isolated" from outside reality.

11. In a conversation with the Indian ambassador in Moscow on 22 February, Soviet Premier Kosygin condemned the US air strikes against North Vietnam and said that the Soviet leadership could not possibly counsel Hanoi to encourage a cease fire so long as US bombardments continue.

Communist Military Developments

12. Hanoi announced yesterday that "tens of thousands" of youths and students are engaged in a massive emulation campaign known as the "three-ready" movement. Featuring such military "sports" as forced marches, weapons qualification firing, and grenade throwing, the movement is evidently aimed at increasing North Vietnamese civil defense preparedness. In Hanoi alone, some 120,000 youths allegedly have signed up for the part-time military training.

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13. The practical result of such an effort, if it is efficiently carried out, would be the formation of a large teen-age militia guard which could serve as a ready source of conscripts for the regular army and provide some measure of increased military readiness. Communist China launched a similar campaign last summer to build up and arm its burgeoning militia forces.

14. Some of the International Control Commission teams have begun withdrawing from North Vietnam at the insistence of the Hanoi government. In issuing the withdrawal demand on 13 February, Hanoi stated that it could no longer assure the safety of the team members in North Vietnam. The first teams reportedly left from Dong Hoi, Hon Gay (on the coast near Haiphong), and Lao Kay on the Sino-Vietnamese border.

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